

## Personal recollections of the contributions of Estelle Brodman: an enduring legacy for health sciences librarianship

Estelle Brodman, PhD (1914–2007), remains one of the most illustrious and revered health sciences librarian leaders of all time, widely respected for her intellect, knowledge, publications, teaching, and mentoring. The genesis of this special focus issue was a proposal prepared by T. Mark Hodges, representing the Fellows of the Medical Library Association, and based on discussions between Hodges and Lucretia W. McClure, AHIP, FMLA.

Dr. Brodman had great influence on health sciences librarianship in all her roles—librarian, historian, educator, consultant, teacher, and mentor. She was widely admired and received many honors throughout her career. Her scholarly record and prescient ideas about health sciences librarianship have stood the test of time, and this focus issue honors her enduring legacy by exploring aspects of her long and distinguished career through the authors' personal recollections and thoughts on Dr. Brodman's contributions to the profession and her own oral history. The areas discussed include Dr. Brodman's impact on library technology, her focus on education, her emphasis on international initiatives, and her role as a historian. An accompanying guest editorial completes the portrait of an extraordinary health sciences librarian.

Dr. Brodman's professional career was served in three institutions: Columbia University, the Army Medical Library, and Washington University. At Columbia's College of Physicians and Surgeons Library, she was assistant librarian from 1937 to 1949 and taught the medical librarianship course in the Columbia University School of Library Service. In 1949, she became assistant librarian for reference services at the Army Medical Library (now the National Library of Medicine), and, in 1961, she was named director and associate professor in the history of medicine at the Washington University School of Medicine Library in St. Louis. She became a full professor in 1964.

Dr. Brodman was very active in the Medical Library Association (MLA), serving as editor of the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association (BMLA)* from 1947 to 1957, member of the MLA Board of Directors from 1962 to 1964, and MLA president in 1964/65. Her doctoral dissertation, *The Development of Medical Bibliography*, was published by MLA as its publication number 1 in 1954. She was also active in the Special Libraries Association (SLA), serving as a director from 1949 to 1952.

When she retired from the *BMLA* editorship in 1957, MLA presented her with a special award for exemplary service to the association. In a 1952 *BMLA* editorial, she stated that intellectual toughness is a very important trait for an editor. She liked to write and edit, and her standards for manuscripts were

very high. She completed her decade with the *BMLA*, saying it had become a different journal from the one she began editing in 1947 [1]. And it had.

Her many awards included: Janet Doe Lectureship in 1971, Marcia C. Noyes Award in 1971, and John Cotton Data Award from SLA in 1981. She received an honorary doctor of sciences degree from the University of Illinois in 1974. She was presented with the first Lisabeth M. Holloway Award by the Archivists and Librarians in the History of the Health Sciences in 1993 and received MLA's Murray Gottlieb Prize for her article, "Pediatrics in an Eighteenth Century Remedy Book," in 1977 [2].

Other significant activities included membership on the President's Commission on Libraries from 1966 to 1968 and the Missouri Governor's Pre-Conference in preparation for the White House Conference on Libraries in 1979. She served on the Council of the American Association for the History of Medicine from 1967 to 1969 and participated in the Biomedical Communication Study Section of the National Institutes of Health from 1972 to 1975, serving as chair in 1974 to 1975 [3].

This focus issue attempts to capture the essence of her professional life through descriptions of her contributions in automation, education, international activities, and history. Peay and Schoening [4] describe Dr. Brodman's contributions to the development of automation in libraries, spanning the era of the manual typewriter, to punch cards, to the creation of national network services. She was always ready to seek answers to challenging problems and never hesitated to take risks to solve them. Her first projects involved creating a comprehensive serials management system for Washington University School of Medicine Library. She pushed hard to make use of every known technology, instituted a computer training program, and documented the successes and failures in her publications.

Lorenzi [5] focuses on Dr. Brodman's passion for education and narrates the interest and concern over a professional lifetime using Dr. Brodman's own words. Her concern that many librarians did not see the need for continuing education prompted her to focus on that issue as MLA president, when she helped establish programs that offered continuing education for members.

Homan [6] surveys Dr. Brodman's international activities and her approach to international consulting and places them in the context of the evolution of MLA's international cooperation and outreach activities. As a consultant and teacher, she was sought after by various groups in Japan, India, and Thailand. In the spirit of the internationalist stance of MLA following World War II, she promoted an interna-

**Figure 1**

A brief encounter by Eric Meyerhoff, AHIP, FMLA

In the summer of 1951, I took the course in "Bibliographic and Reference Service in the Medical Sciences" taught by Estelle Brodman, PhD, at the School of Library Service of Columbia University. The class met at 8:00 a.m. at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, at 168th Street in Manhattan. She had written the syllabus, the second edition of *Bibliographic Lists for Medical Libraries*, our basic text. I still have a copy with my notes. The course was approved by the Medical Library Association and had been initiated by Professor Thomas P. Fleming of the Library School who was a member of the faculty of medicine.

Without air-conditioning, the classroom was stiflingly hot, even at eight o'clock in the morning. Our teacher was a beautiful but imposing figure. In later years, she became much slimmer, and it is a mark of her characteristic determination that she managed to sustain this. Her presentation was literate, serious, interesting, and informed. She was not about to entertain us with jokes. Bibliographies and standard textbooks including encyclopedias and those massive German "Handbuecher" were emphasized, but Dr. Brodman also addressed classification systems, the conduct of reference interviews, and the structure of scientific papers. Her undergraduate and graduate studies in biology provided a solid basis for her critical judgment of the material presented. As the introduction to her entry in *Marquis Who's Who*, she wrote: "The transmission of scientific, especially medical, information from research worker to research worker, and from them to the deliverer of medical care and to the laymen who make decisions about these matters, in the past few decades has been an exciting and mind-expanding enterprise. The development of such tools as the computer, and the social diversity of those needing information for daily use have completely changed scientific librarianship from a passive to an active operation. Transfer versus storage are the key words. I have been lucky to be involved in this field at so interesting and purposeful a time." This time was still to come when I took her course. Literature searches were accomplished by reading journals and typing or writing the bibliographic references that were judged relevant.

I have tried unsuccessfully to find a record of the roster of students who were my classmates. In her oral history, she mentions Brad Rogers, Louise Darling, and Jacqueline Felter as being in her class. They were not in the class I attended. The Rare Books and Manuscripts Library of Columbia University has her papers ca. 1950–1987 (20 linear feet, ca. 14,000 items in 46 boxes). I examined the boxes of materials concerning her teaching at the school of library service but failed to find any class records. I remember two persons: Robert Lewis was then reference librarian and later head of reference and circulation at the Biomedical Library of the University of California at Los Angeles. Lewis became librarian of the Biomedical Library of the University of California San Diego and editor of the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*. I also remember most vividly a robust fellow named Armstrong who was librarian at the Bureau of Laboratories of the City of New York. He always seemed combative when he raised questions. One morning, he came to class seemingly inebriated and raised a barrage of questions. For a moment, Dr. Brodman answered seriously but soon understood what was happening. She gained her composure and asked Armstrong to leave. He left and at the next session apologized.

Every student had to write a paper. Mine was a survey of published guides to the medical literature. She encouraged me to submit it to the *Bulletin*, and it was published in 1953. After Dr. Brodman retired, she moved to a retirement facility in Hightstown, NJ. From time to time, Philip Rosenstein, the librarian of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, would arrange to drive some of us to visit her and Gertrude Annan, who was in the same facility. It is an unfortunate consequence of living to an old age that those who really know you have already passed. Among those who knew Estelle Brodman are Frank Bradway Rogers, David Kronick, Scott Adams, Irwin Pizer, Jean Miller, Gertrude Annan, Harriett Steuernagel, and others. Despite the passage of time and the death of contemporaries, her reputation as an outstanding intellect, scholar, and innovator is so firmly established that she is cited again and again at our gatherings. [9]

tional flavor as *BMLA* editor by establishing the first international column called "News from London."

McClure [7] identifies and describes Dr. Brodman's publications in the history of medicine, in the development of an oral history program at MLA, and as an author and speaker on topics in history. She was an excellent writer and speaker who could inspire an audience with her intellect and wit.

While Dr. Brodman's professional achievements and honors can be objectively described, what was she really like as a person? In this regard, her oral history is a revelation [3]. In this record, she is witty, catty, profound, and frank. Of her many publications, the one that captures her intensity and professional commitment best is her Janet Doe Lecture, "The Pursuit of Excellence," in 1971 [8]. "There is no quick and easy way to excellence, and the sooner we acknowledge that fact, the more likely are we not to waste our energies in day dreams and in devising turns of the wheel to determine our future." She continues, "For the pursuit of excellence is a statement of faith in ourselves and our abilities and our minds to reason ... so should we as fearlessly pursue professional excellence, secure in the belief in our capability for solving problems, trusting in the honesty and good will of our colleagues, and thinking always to advance that high calling which we profess" [8]. She stirred the audience with her words and convictions. This is a beautiful article that attempts to define excellence and then show how to apply the concept to the problems facing librarians. The speech is peppered with references to individuals and situations from the past. I read it frequently and find it as relevant today as when I heard the lecture.

Her longtime colleague, Gertrude L. Annan, was able to capture some of the essence of Dr. Brodman as

an individual in a 1957 editorial at the conclusion of the Dr. Brodman decade at the *BMLA*. Annan cautioned those who might assume from her academic and publishing record that she must have resided austere in a grim ivory tower. They would be mistaken, when Dr. Brodman's "punning mood is evoked." She is "equally at ease dropping these gems of humor or discussing Greek drama, discoursing on bibliography or reading detective stories, admiring the 'original flooring' of a colonial mansion or taking the younger generation to the circus, dining at Antoine's with a fervent enthusiasm or stoically consuming cottage cheese and jello." Annan points out that it is the truly deep love of learning and of constantly stimulating a mind that is the one characteristic that explains Estelle Brodman [9].

Teaching was a passion, and nothing could be better than a firsthand account of a student to ascertain the measure of the individual. More than fifty years ago, Dr. Brodman taught the medical bibliography course at Columbia University School of Library Service. One of her library school students, Erich Meyerhoff, AHIP, FMLA, related his experience of taking her course in 1951 [10] (Figure 1).

This focus issue will stir memories for those who knew Estelle Brodman. It will also serve as an introduction to those individuals who did not know her personally or about her. Dr. Brodman's legacy will endure. Her ideas, expressed in this issue, were compelling. She was not hesitant to utilize new technologies and did so at a time when there was no assurance of success. She exhorted and prodded medical librarians to continue to learn and grow. Teaching was one of her passions, and she taught medical students; library school students, both here and abroad; and her colleagues. Her writing was inspiring, and her publica-

tions remain pertinent to this day. She challenged our profession and, in doing so, made it better.

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